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A Guide to the 1992 Massachusetts Educational Assessment Program

Massachusetts Department of Education

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE MASSACHUSETTS EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

The Massachusetts Educational Assessment Program was established under Chapter 188 of the Educational Reform Bill of 1985.

What is the purpose of the program?

The purpose of the Massachusetts Educational Assessment Program is to compare educational performance among schools and districts throughout the state and to improve curriculum and instruction.

When is the Assessment given?

The Assessment is given biennially, in even years, in January for Grade 12 and in April for Grades 4 and 8.

What is the nature of the Assessment?

Most test items are multiple-choice questions; some are open-ended, requiring students to write short answers. Students also complete questionnaires about their backgrounds and attitudes toward learning. Teachers and principals complete questionnaires focusing on what is taught in their school. These questionnaires provide useful information for planning curriculum and instructional improvement.

How long do the tests take?

Total testing time is 90 to 120 minutes per grade level. To cut down on the testing time required, the entire test battery is divided into several forms; each student takes one form. This provides accurate and valid results at the school and district levels while keeping testing time to a minimum.

Which students are tested?

All students at grades 4, 8, and 12 take the MEAP tests. Exemptions include students incapable of performing ordinary classwork in English and enrolled in TBE programs fewer than 3 years (unless requested by the parent), or special needs students (if requested by the parent).

How are schools compared to one another?

The Comparison Score Bands used in reporting results are constructed from background information provided by students and school staff and allow schools to compare their results to those of schools with similar background characteristics. The background information used has been shown to correlate with educational achievement and provides information useful in planning curriculum and instructional improvement.

What are the responsibilities of the districts?

The responsibilities involve administering all testing, including maintaining accurate counts of eligible students; attending training programs for giving the tests; informing school personnel about testing programs; distributing, collecting, and returning all test materials; and making test results publicly available.

What are the costs to the school system?

The state assumes all costs involved in preparing, delivering, and collecting test materials and scoring, analyzing, and reporting results.

How were the tests developed?

Advisory committees of educators participated in the setting of objectives and the development of tests for the Assessment. Actual test items are developed, then field tested at the appropriate levels. In addition, assessment testing makes extensive use of items from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

How are results reported?

Assessment testing results are reported at the building, district, and state levels through score averages and distributions. The performance of different groups of students within schools and the relationship between performance and background and attitudinal factors are also reported.

How are the results made public?

Detailed reports are released to schools and districts in October following the test administration. Public dissemination follows three weeks later. Compilations of results are available at the Department of Education, the State House, and major public libraries.

Does any testing occur during the "off" year?

In years during which there is no statewide assessment, schools and districts may administer the tests in order to increase the quality of their results and interpretation. This service is free for small schools. Other schools pay a nominal fee to cover analysis and reporting.

How are results used?

Chapter 188 specifies that Assessment results be used in connection with other information for evaluating individual public schools and school systems. The primary intention of the legislation, however, is that results be used to improve curriculum and instruction.

Will Massachusetts scores be compared to national scores?

In 1992 Massachusetts will be participating in a national state-by-state comparison program based on questions common to the participating states. This program will allow Massachusetts educators to analyze their results relative to other states, providing important information to help improve instruction in Massachusetts.

What's New for the Testing Programs in 1992?

Basic Skills Testing Eliminated

The Basic Skills Testing Program of Chapter 188 has been eliminated due to budget constraints, although the ability to identify the number of students below passing levels will be possible through the proficiency levels of the Assessment. Basic proficiency level scores will be determined and the number of students at each school failing to achieve that level will be reported.

Open-ended Questions Expanded

All students in grades 4, 8, and 12 will be taking open-ended questions as part of the upcoming assessment. Questions will cover the four subject areas of the assessment, and will represent approximately 30% of the overall score.

Writing Assessment

Writing will be assessed in all subject areas through evaluation of writing associated with the open-ended questions. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively within each of the subject areas will be assessed along with other communication attributes.

Proficiency Levels Emphasized

Proficiency levels, pilot tested during the 1990 assessment, will be given greater emphasis during the 1992 assessment. Determination of student proficiency will be based on responses to the open-ended questions and related multiple-choice questions.

For additional information contact:

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